

[Mrs. Mary McNeill Faye]

1

[EARLY SETTLEMENT?]

William V. Ervin, [P.W.?]

Erath County, Texas.

District No. 8

[PioneerHistory?]

[wk 7?]

No. of words 1277

File No. 230

Page 1

OCT 19 1936

[S-230?] Reference

A. Mrs. Mary McNeill Faye, Stephenville, Texas.

Dr. W. W. McNeill, a young physician; Major George B. Erath and John [N.?] Stephen, came into the frontier country in search of a good location for their homes, in the spring of 1854. [On?] the spot where the town of Stephenville, county seat of [Erath?] [County?], now stands they found what they were looking for in the way of tillable land with plenty of [grass?], water and game, [and?] located there.

Library of Congress

Major Erath and John [M.?] Stephen surveyed the land into farms, and laid off the town-site of the present city of Stephenville. This was in the [John?] Blair Survey which was owned by Major Erath.

Making maps and plates of his surveys, Major [Erath?] sent them to the [Legislature?] with the proposition that if the Legislature would create a county in that territory, designating Stephenville the county seat, the [Major?] would deed to the county a block of ground for the court house, also, blocks for a jail and one to each of the religious denominations; [Methodist?], [Presbyterian?], Christian and Baptist; for their churches. He further offered to deed free to the town all the ground [necessary?] for the streets and alleys. This proposal was sent to [Justin?] July 4th, 1855, and the Legislature accepted it January 25, 1856. The county erected was named for [Major?] Erath. The county seat was named Stephenville for John M. Stephen.

The men built log cabins after their selection of the site for their settlement in 1854, and in the fall of that year moved their families there. Lumber for the erection of a store, post-office and union church was brought by ox-wagon from Waco. C12 - [2/11/41?] - Texas 2 Indians still ranged the frontier and made [frequent?] raids upon the settlers. On one of the raids the oldest son of John Stephen, Samuel, was killed. While Major Erath and Stephen were on a surveying trip the Major noticed smoke rising from a ravine. Saying to his party that he believed there were Indians in the draw, the Major went to investigate. He crawled on his hands and knees to the edge of the bank, and in order to get a better view he took hold of a bush and leaned over the bank with weight on the bush. The shrub gave way, and the Major fell sprawling among the amazed redskins. On his way to the bottom of the ravine the Major sent up a yell of "Charge them, boys! Charge them!" When he could clear the dust from his eyes sufficiently to see, the Major discovered the Indians were leaving that part of the country as fast as they could travel.

Dr. McNeill married the only daughter of Stephen. Their first child, John A. McNeill, was the first white child born in Stephenville. The young physician found that being a frontier

Library of Congress

doctor called for great physical courage and endurance as well as a sufficient degree of medical skill. Often called to go fifty miles or more in the stormiest weather to attend the sick, he made such-trips alone, on horse-back, through forest and across streams with no sign of a road, where every tree was a possible hiding place of savages or panthers [and?] wildcats. Once when returning from a long trip where he had been called to the bedside of a woman who lay seriously ill, the doctor was attacked by Indians. The arrows flying around him the doctor put his mare to the best speed [she?] had. An arrow struck the mare, but she carried her rider home, falling dead when they had reached safety. 3 Dr. McNeill was the first physician in Stephenville. He became a civic leader of the town and helped to organize and was a charter member of the first Masonic Lodge in Erath County. [With?] ten other charter members he organized the first Methodist Church in [Stephenville?], in the fall of 1854. He also became the town's first postmaster. He died at the age of eighty-three years.

The first postoffice building was one block east of the courthouse square, the present location of the Clay Lumber Company. Mail was carried by horse-back to [Meridian?] and [Waco?]. It cost five cents to post a letter and five cents to the carrier.

The first school house was located one block west of the of the courthouse and was built of cedar lumber brought by ox-wagon from [Waco?]. It was a two story building, the school occupying the lower floors and the Masonic Lodge the upper.

Only one log house of the original town now stands. It is located two blocks west of the square, on [Washington?] Street, and was preserved by [Mrs.?] [Pearl?] Cage.

The first cotton was raised in Erath County in 1869. [The?] first cotton gin, established by Walker & Conley in 1870, was situated six miles southeast of [Stephenville?] on the [Bosque?] River. It was operated by horse-power. The first steam-powered gin was erected by Wilson [&?] Tolar. It was near the bridge on [east?] [Washington?] Street.

Library of Congress

The first grist mill was built and [operated?] by Captain Thomas Carmae, in 1858. It was located where the present jail now stands. It was operated by ox-power, two oxen [treading?] an endless chain on an incline turned the millstones. 4 The first [steam?] flour mill was built by [Thomas?] Drue, who brought forty negro slaves with him to Stephenville in 1859. When the slaves were freed at the close of the Civil War they had no employment and no means of transportation, not even teams and wagons, to go where they might find employment. They would chop wood or make rails all day for their dinner and suppers. When they would receive their meal, usually a beef cooked in washpots, they would go away singing.

The Drue mill was located across the [Bosque?] River at the east end of Long Street, northeast of town. The mill was sold to Basle & Quinn, who put in the sawmill in connection with the flour mill. They sawed much cottonwood, oak [and?] elm timber for the settlers.

The first store was established by Bateman & Frey, about 1866, and was [located?] where the Stephenville State Bank now stands.

The courthouse, which was situated on the lot now occupied [by?] the Frank [Henson?] store, [and?] the county records burned in 1867.

The first county officers to be elected when Erath County was organized in 1856 were: Dr. W. [?] McNeill, county clerk; Sam [Hix?], sheriff; Judge Dupoy, county judge; [Mr.?] Buras, tax collector and assessor; J. [?] McNeill, justice of the peace.

There were no public funds for the schools. They were operated on subscription funds. Often the schools lasted only two or three months. The books mostly used were [McGuffey's?] readers, three R's course, [Webster's?] blue-beck speller [and?] dictionary, Davies' arithmetic, copy book.

Library of Congress

A museum containing relics of early settlement in [Erath?] County is to be erected just north of the beautiful new city library on Green Street. The Centennial monument to [Major?] George [B.?] [Erath?] is being erected on Erath Street. (A)